



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Constructing tales of the field

**Citation for published version:**

Souhami, A 2020, 'Constructing tales of the field: Uncovering the culture of fieldwork in police ethnography', *Policing and Society*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 206-223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2019.1628230>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/10439463.2019.1628230](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2019.1628230)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Policing and Society

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Policing and Society* on 12 Jun 2019, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10439463.2019.1628230>.

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# **Constructing tales of the field: uncovering the culture of fieldwork in police ethnography**

**Anna Souhami**

**School of Law, Old College, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK**

## **Abstract**

One of the core contributions of the strong tradition of police ethnography is the emergence of a powerful critique of police culture. Through this work, researchers have explored the informal norms that structure police practices and the implications both for the experiences of policing and for central questions of social justice. Yet while research has demonstrated the power of occupational cultures in shaping what professionals consider important and thus what they do, there has been little attention paid to the culture that underpins the work through which police ethnography is produced.

This paper explores how ethnographers construct accounts of fieldwork with the police and interrogates the patterned understandings that structure the way researchers think about and do police ethnography. Returning to unpublished fieldnotes generated as part of a major study of policing in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, it interrogates their connections with published fieldwork ‘confessionals’ to uncover the unarticulated conventions of what has come to constitute authoritative fieldwork. It suggests that accounts of ethnographic fieldwork reproduce a narrative of research in which researchers attempt to conform to the dominant norms of the setting; which emphasises tales of physicality, endurance, risk and action; and in which raw, undirected emotion is excised. This suggests a central irony in police ethnography: the dynamics of police culture it so powerfully criticises are reflected in the construction of the ethnographic process.

## **Introduction**

One of the core contributions of the strong tradition of police ethnography is the emergence of a powerful critique of police culture. Through observation of policing in action, researchers have illuminated the informal norms that structure discretionary police practices and the implications for social justice (for an overview, see Loftus 2009, Reiner 2010). In particular, researchers have uncovered a dominant construction of ‘real’ police work, in forms of work which promote ‘crime-fighting’, physicality, action and danger are culturally prized, and those which do not are denigrated or avoided (e.g. Rabe-Hemp 2009, Silvestri 2017, Smith and Grey 1983). Yet while research has carefully demonstrated the power of occupational cultures in shaping what professionals consider important and thus what they do, there has been little attention paid to the norms that underpin the work through which this research is produced.

This paper draws on accounts of fieldwork with the police to explore the patterned understandings that structure the work of ethnographic police research. Through this approach, this paper aims to illuminate the importance of the academic field in shaping the way that ethnographers think and work. An important body of work has illuminated the centrality of the researcher self and subjectivities in the construction of meaning in ethnographic research (e.g. Lumsden and Winter 2014; Coffey 1999). From the interactionist perspective of most criminological ethnography, social reality is always interpreted: a partial, selective, ‘re-presentation’ (Emerson 1983) account of social life, mediated through the active participation of the researcher. The identities of the ethnographer and their complex interplay with the social and power relations with the field are therefore central to knowledge production. However, the conception of the ethnographic self in this work is largely concerned with aspects of personal identity, subjectivity or location rather than its situation in the professional field in which knowledge is produced.

Yet while ethnographers attempt to become part of the social relations within the police service, they do so as ongoing members of an academic professional world. As Pearson puts it, ‘Being an ethnographer is to be in two places at the same time’ (1993, ix). Continued membership of this ‘world of work’ (Henry 2017, p171) forms an important lens through which encounters with the police are understood. Whether explicitly or tacitly, researchers draw on the theoretical and methodological resources which are validated and recognised within their ‘epistemic community’ (ibid; also Douglas 1986). As Kleinman and Copp put it, “Field researchers learn—through their teachers, texts, and colleagues—how to feel, think, and act” (1993, p2). Indeed, the recognition and validation by the wider academic field is arguably particularly salient to ethnographic work. Given the interpretative epistemological foundation of ethnography, ethnographers are unable to demonstrate the authority of their research by any independent standard of ‘proof’, such as validity, reliability and representativeness. Instead, they must show that their accounts are authentic, or authoritative: they must create ‘plausible social worlds’ (Atkinson 1990, p9) to convince the reader that their account carries authority. In other words, ethnographies are intended to persuade. As Van Maanen puts it: “a good part of our writing is both explicitly and implicitly designed to persuade others that we know what we are talking about and they ought therefore to pay attention to what we are saying.” (2010, p240).

In this way, the field that police ethnographers enter is not simply that of the police: it is of the police as a site of sociological inquiry. The way we think and work is filtered through

our own professional preoccupations, and in particular the need to demonstrate the authority of our work.

In this paper I explore how ethnographers construct the work of fieldwork with the police and consider what these suggest about the unarticulated conventions of what has come to constitute authoritative ethnographic research. I argue first that, however unconsciously, researchers curate their tales of fieldwork even in their most private writings such as fieldnotes. Through the selection and presentation of material, accounts are structured in a way which gives priority to some aspects of the fieldwork experience and keeps others hidden. Second, the structuring of these accounts reveal common themes, which appear to reflect patterned understandings about what has come to constitute authoritative fieldwork with the police: a construction of ‘real’ police fieldwork in which some elements of research are prioritised and others devalued. And third, the preoccupations of researchers closely mirror those of police officers themselves. As I will show, a picture of fieldwork emerges which prioritises a particular form of field relations in which researchers attempt to conform to the dominant norms of the setting; which emphasises tales of physicality, endurance, risk and action; and in which unmediated and undirected emotion is excised. This suggests a central irony in police ethnography: the dynamics of police culture it so powerfully criticises are reflected in the construction of the ethnographic process.

To explore these issues I draw on two forms of ethnographic account<sup>1</sup>. Centrally, I critically reflect on original, unpublished fieldnotes generated as part of a major study of policing in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (REF 1) over fifteen years ago. This was the largest study of police/community relations in the UK, involving two years’ intensive fieldwork with police services and local communities throughout England and Wales. The research took place after the publication of the report of the public Inquiry into the failed police investigation of the 1993 racist murder of black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in South London (Macpherson 1999). The impact of the Inquiry, and in particular its conclusion that

---

<sup>1</sup> A note about the scope of this paper. Given the interests of this special issue, I have focused this discussion on police ethnography, although it is likely that much of what I have to say here extends to other areas of criminological fieldwork. The paper is concerned with the work of fieldwork rather than the final ethnographic product, even though these are, of course, closely connected (e.g. Rock 2001). Further, I am attempting to explore how ethnographers construct the practice of fieldwork rather than a discipline more broadly, though it is likely these too are connected given the centrality of fieldwork to the anthropology (e.g. Gupta and Fergusson 1997). It is also important to note that the concern of this paper is with how researchers represent fieldwork rather than what they actually do. Indeed, I argue that there is much of the fieldwork practice that is omitted from these accounts. However, it is through these tales of the field that it is possible to see an orientation towards what is considered ‘authoritative’, trustworthy fieldwork.

the failure of the Metropolitan police service was due in part to ‘institutional racism’, was profound. Throughout England and Wales, police services and the officers within them found themselves under intense political and public scrutiny, and urgently needed to demonstrate they were tackling the problems raised by the Inquiry (REF 3). Several years after the publication of the Inquiry, I was appointed to a small academic research team funded by the UK Home Office to discover what, if anything, had resulted from this activity.

This was a challenging research experience. In the aftermath of the Inquiry the atmosphere in the police service was fraught with anxiety. It was also my first postdoctoral job. I was on a temporary contract at what I hoped might be the start of a research career, and I was responsible for the bulk of the ethnographic fieldwork for this important project. As such, these notes are particularly useful cultural products: they are an account of a novice researcher not only trying to navigate the highly charged world of the police, but the conventions of ethnographic research too. Through an ‘ethnographic returning’ (O’Reilly 2012) to these notes after many years, I explore some of the decisions, descriptions and omissions in my accounts.

It is of course possible that the experiences described here simply reflect my own interpretation of what ethnographic research involves or a particular culture of work that had emerged within our team, although it is perhaps unlikely that these ideas were unconnected to any more widely held ideas about what constitutes authentic fieldwork. Secondly, therefore, I explore their connections with published accounts of the process of police fieldwork: a genre of writing that Van Maanen (1988) has termed the ‘fieldwork confessional’ (see e.g. Diphooorn 2012, Fassin 2017a, Hunt 2010, Jauregui 2013, Kreska 1998 Loftus 2009, Lumsden 2009, Marks 2004, Punch 1989, Rowe 2007, Westmarland 2000, 2001).

The paper focuses on fieldwork moments which I understood to be examples of ‘initiations’ or ‘member tests’: instances in which the outsider status of the researcher is brought into focus, and their relationships with the field are overtly or implicitly challenged. Tests are a recurring theme in writing about police ethnography (see e.g. Diphooorn 2012, Loftus 2009, Marks 2004, Smith and Grey 1985) and in ethnographic writing more broadly (e.g. Van Maanen 1988, Atkinson 1990). They are particularly revealing moments in research, as it is here that the disjunction between cultural worlds becomes visible. For the ethnographer, the culture of the researched organisation become particularly clear. For participants, the researcher’s response is an important source of information about them (Diphooorn 2012). In

addition, these moments are revealing about the norms of academic fieldwork . As I will show, the way we reveal and resolve our responses these moments – and the very construction of them as tests - also illuminates the unspoken, informal assumptions about what constitutes ‘real’, authoritative police fieldwork.

This paper focuses on three areas of perceived challenge which are common themes in writing about police research: dealing with jokes; enduring physical discomfort and risk, and managing emotion. First, I set out the importance of accounts of research as a site for exploration of conventions of fieldwork, and the methodology through which my own account was generated.

## **Curating the fieldwork experience**

Accounts of fieldwork are particularly available in ethnographic research. While the author is still frequently excised from published ethnographies, researchers attempt to avoid the impression of ‘interpretative omniscience’ (Van Maanen 1988, p51) this implies through the inclusion of a ‘confessional tale’ (Van Maanen 1988) or ‘ethnographer’s story’ (Atkinson 1990): a reflexive narrative of the fieldwork process which is often (if decreasingly: see Van Maanen 2006) separated from the main ‘realist’ text. By placing the author back in the field, these tales are intended to ‘unmask’ (Van Maanen 1988, p91) the fieldwork process and reveal the interpretative complexity and uncertainty that may be excised from the published text. It is there that researchers can, for example, show the complexity of field relations and reveal their doubts, dilemmas and mistakes. They also allow for important reflections on the nature of ethnographic authority, interrogating the dialectic between experience and interpretation and the implications for knowledge claims (e.g. Clifford 1983).

Yet while this genre of writing purports to reveal the messiness of the unfinished accounts of fieldwork, confessional tales are curated. The conventions of the written form to some degree require a narrative account: reports of fieldwork activity are inevitably edited or omitted. However, the selection and presentation of material in these accounts has an overarching purpose: confessional tales have an important role in contributing to the ‘persuasive force’ (Atkinson 1990, p57) on which ethnographic authority depends.

This is achieved in part simply by uncovering the first hand participation and attendance of the ethnographer: the researcher becomes an expert witness to their own research (Atkinson

1990). Further, by revealing the ways in which the ethnography is generated, accounts demonstrate the quality of the author's methodological and reflexive understanding. As a result, as Van Maanen puts it, the reader can 'work back' from the trustworthiness of the confessional account to assess the trustworthiness of the main text (1988, p92). Tales have conventional tropes: they are usually written in the first person, and by showing the dilemmas and mistakes of the novice researcher they demonstrate the extent to which the ethnographer has become expert, often through responding to 'member tests' (Van Maanen 1988, Atkinson 1990). In particular, as Van Maanen notes, the confessional tale usually supports the findings of the research. While writers may be forthcoming with their confessions of their limitations and misapprehensions, they are "unlikely to come to the conclusion that they have been misled dramatically, that they got it wrong, or that they have otherwise presented falsehoods to their trusting audience' (1988, p79).

As a result, while confessional tales are intended to reveal the messiness of the research process, they are constructed, self-edited and partial accounts. The priorities, omissions and framing of experiences in these accounts are therefore revealing of the preoccupations of ethnographic researchers as we attempt to demonstrate our authority<sup>2</sup>.

This process of self-editing also curates the writing of fieldnotes. Fieldnotes may appear a form of writing free from the constructions of published ethnographic writing: they are 'private documents' (Atkinson 1990, p57), often seeming 'too revealingly personal, too messy and unfinished to be shown to any audience' (Emerson et al 2011, xv). Yet even the earliest 'backstage scribbles' (Emerson et al 2011, p xx) that comprise early fieldnotes are products of selection, interpretation and construction. This may be an unreflexive, unconscious process in which ethnographers notice and write about what they have learned is relevant to an ethnographic task<sup>3</sup>. It may also be a more conscious one: Emerson et al (2011) argue that the need to construct notes for publication means that ethnographers are continually aware of an external audience, even in their most private writings. As a result, researchers constantly shift between writing notes for themselves and for an outside reader: '[i]ntended and anticipated audiences, as well as the theoretical commitments they reflect, linger as an influential presence over every ethnographer's shoulder' (2011, p93).

---

<sup>2</sup> There is an inevitable paradox in this paper: through attempting to critically analyse the construction of my previous work, I am following the convention of the confessional tale: as such, this paper is of course no less a construction intended to convey my own methodological authority than the work I am exploring.

<sup>3</sup> Rowe (2007) for example describes how he prepared for ethnographic police research by reading the works of others, and determining that tales of police deviance were going to be important.

Through these processes of self-editing therefore, writing about fieldwork – including in fieldnotes – attempt to convey authority. These accounts and the silences within them are therefore useful in uncovering a construction of ‘real’ ethnographic fieldwork with the police: just like ‘real’ police work, they suggest what we deem to be worthy of attention and what is not, what responses and experiences are appropriate and which shows us - and therefore our work - to be authoritative.

The fieldnotes I use in this paper are particularly interesting in exploring these constructions as they were consciously written with an audience in mind. A decision was made in our project team that any data generated throughout the project would be shared with my senior colleagues. The notes were written explicitly for this purpose: on rare occasions (including one I describe below) I address my colleagues explicitly. Through the accounts that follow therefore I am trying to persuade my senior colleagues both of the authority of my research and of me as an ethnographer.

### **Generating and re-studying fieldnotes**

The fieldnotes in this article were generated through two years’ fieldwork, conducted from 2002 to 2004. Fieldwork took place in five police areas throughout England and Wales, which were selected to provide a range of policing context (city, town, urban, rural); demographics (size and characteristics of minority ethnic population); force size; and geographical spread. I spent approximately two weeks in two ‘pilot’ areas at the beginning of the project, and six months in each of three main study sites. In each of these main sites, depending on local arrangements I worked in either two or three police stations. I conducted sets of full eight- or ten-hour shifts (between three and five days, depending on local shift patterns) with approximately three teams in each station and with specialist units (such as proactive teams and community teams) where these were available. Fieldwork was supplemented by depth interviews with officers at all ranks. Research also involved interviews and focus groups with minority ethnic communities in all research areas in order to explore experiences and perceptions of policing in the local context (for detailed methodology, see Foster et al 2005).

During the fieldwork with the police I took notes openly, primarily to demonstrate transparency in a climate of widespread anxiety in the aftermath of the Inquiry and alleviate officers’ fears that they would be ‘grassed up’ to their bosses (see REF 3). These notes consisted of prompts of incidents, snatches of conversation, extended reflections in rare



moments of privacy, or, on occasion, extended informal interviews when these arose out of conversations. I wrote these up at the end of every day into detailed observations on the events I had witnessed and my reflections on them, usually producing approximately ten pages of typed text for every eight hour shift. The close connection between observation and writing was intended to increase recall, but also allowed me to capture the insights from my initial observations or adaptations to the setting before they became diluted through the lens of ‘some final, ultimate interpretation of their meaning and import’ (Emerson et al 2011, p17). After I had completed a series of shifts in a particular location, these were compiled into long documents and sent, unedited, to my colleagues.

### **Re-studying fieldnotes**

This paper therefore centres on a return to fieldnotes fifteen years after they were generated. Through this approach I am attempting an ‘ethnographic returning’ (O’Reilly 2012) such as that employed in the practice of community re-studies, in which researchers revisit sites of ethnographic fieldwork, often after many years (e.g. Charles 2012, Scheper-Hughes 2000). Temporal distance and re-immersion provide a further mode of the continual shifts between familiarity and distance, attachment and detachment through which the ethnographic process generates understanding. The field to which I am returning here is not that of the police however, but the academic field of police research. In one sense I have never left the field: I remain an academic ethnographer. Yet the shifting form of an academic career allows for distancing: like many other researchers, I have moved between different types of work, areas of study, institutions and personal experience, each of which have generated new perspectives (see also O’Reilly 2012). Re-studying these fieldnotes from an altered personal field of practice therefore provides insights which may have been unavailable at the time the research was conducted.

The following pages returns to the particular dynamics of the field in which these fieldnotes were generated. It explores how they were mediated by my own biography, and the circumstances in which I deemed ‘member tests’ to be of particular importance.

### **Entering the field**

When I began this research I had no prior contact with the police at all: I had never even been in a police station. As a naïve observer, several well-noted cultural features of police work

were immediately apparent in the organisation of daily life, and which were paramount in my interpretation of the dynamics in which my fieldnotes were constructed.

First, there was a consistent staff profile in all the police services in the research. The overwhelming majority of police officers were white, male, and self-identified as working class and heterosexual. As a woman I was therefore highly conspicuous<sup>4</sup>.

Second, the rigidity of occupational hierarchy was a constant presence in officers' working lives. As one Police Constable (PC) put it, 'the sergeant is God'. On rare occasions when the hierarchical order was breached the shock and confusion among officers was palpable. For example, after an incident at a muddy river bank (described below), a sergeant washed the mud off a special constable's boots:

[The special constable] looks astonished and mildly embarrassed... [officers] all joke about the boots being the only bit of him showing out of the sergeant's arse.

The sanctity of occupational structure permeated even the mundane routines of police work. This was demonstrated by the ritual of tea making, which was repeated in almost every station in every site throughout the research. Tea was produced at every pre-shift briefing. Ostensibly, it was a 'ritual comfort' (see Rhodes 2005, p17) reaffirming the collegiate nature of police work. However it was also a means for staff to learn their status in relation to their peers. Tea was usually made by a probationer (often those newest to the team) and distributed in order of status: inspectors received their tea first, followed by the sergeants, then the PCs who drove the 'area' (pursuit) cars – a role highly esteemed in a culture which values action and excitement (Reiner 2010); charismatic, long serving PCs were next, followed by the rest of the team. This was therefore a moment at which the complexities of my presence were at issue: the question of when I got my tea highlighted my relatively fluid position outside the organisational hierarchy.

Third, staff commonly reported a shared sense of camaraderie as a highly prized part of the job. This sense of 'team feeling' was often described as arising from officers' dependence on each other for support in difficult situations. However, the feeling of solidarity was also a consequence of officers positioning themselves against the general public: in Parker's terms, the delineation of 'us' and 'them' categories were an essential way of "constituting 'we'"

---

<sup>4</sup> My experience in the research was undoubtedly structured by other aspects of my biography including my ethnicity, sexuality, and able-bodiedness. However, as these matched the dominant characteristics of the officers within the service they did not cause the moments of disjunction which are the focus of this paper.

(2000, p5). Police staff also spent a lot of time together: as well as briefings and meal times, officers were in constant radio contact. Relationships between officers were common. As a result, gossip and rumour were rife. Officers gossiped about each other, people on their patch, and, inevitably, about me.

Fourth, the service was pervaded by an undercurrent of racism, sexism and homophobia. BAME, LGBTQ+ and women officers reported a climate of intangible yet pervasive discrimination in which they felt, as one black PC put it, ‘under attack’. Women commonly described what one Detective Constable (DC) termed a pervasive ‘sexual undercurrent’ in which they felt sexualised and marginalised, were overlooked and excluded in their teams and had to work harder than male officers to ‘prove themselves’ (see REF 3).

As a white, female academic, the power relations during the research were complex. On the one hand, I was relatively powerless. My gender may have facilitated my research: as some women police researchers have described, it may have led me to be seen as unthreatening and trustworthy (see also Loftus 2009, Westmarland 2000). Yet it meant that I was always conspicuous and frequently isolated. I was subject to different treatment: sometimes chivalrous (doors were opened for me, officers apologised for swearing), sometimes less so. In particular I was subject to continual sexualised banter: for example, as I followed a sergeant into a custody suite, he announced to his colleagues “got this one for soliciting”; a PC I had previously worked with waved hello across a street and shouted “Let’s you and me and him [his PC partner] go and have a threesome”. Further, I was an outsider, and could be held back from information or events, particularly if officers felt these made them vulnerable to criticism.

Yet at the same time I held significant power. Unlike any other officer I could move between the ranks, heightening anxieties about whether I was a ‘spy’ for senior staff (see also Loftus 2009). This was also a source of anxiety for senior staff concerned to manage the political implications of my research. For example, one Chief Inspector said “I see you in the canteen surrounded by all these men and I think, ‘oh God, what are they telling her’”. Moreover, I was an academic, doing research commissioned by a powerful state institution. Despite my repeated assurances to the contrary, I became known as ‘the lady from the Home Office’, a description that also acknowledged differentials of class. Most importantly, I was researching the impact of an Inquiry which had recently had devastating consequences for officers, and which was experienced as producing a climate of continuing intense scrutiny of and hostility

to the police (Souhami 2007a, Souhami 2014). In a context where officers felt that behaviour deemed inappropriate could have serious disciplinary consequences for them, my research was viewed with particular suspicion.

### **Understanding member tests**

These dynamics led me to fear an uncomfortable research experience in which I felt I continually risked ostracism. In theory, approval for the research was unproblematic: it had been granted by Chief Constables and directives cascaded through the ranks, an effective strategy given the hierarchical structure of the organisation. Yet of course access is constantly negotiated (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 2007): while officers could be instructed to have me in their car, they did not have to speak to me. Moreover, given the pervasive gossip, I felt a wrong step with one set of officers could close up possibilities throughout the research site. This was implicitly acknowledged at the end of my first day with a new London police team, when one of the officers I had been shadowing said “well Anna, you know, you don’t know someone, you could see it in parade [team briefing], we all thought [inhales in suspicious manner] who is she, what does she want, but I have to say, it’s really been quite pleasant”. He then added, ‘don’t worry, we’ll tell everyone’.

Looking back, it is unclear how precarious the research actually was: indeed, my view of a police world hostile to research contrasts with the widely acknowledged observation that police officers are surprisingly open about the ‘hidden’ parts of their work, even to researchers of police deviance (e.g. Punch 1989, p184), and the honest, personal and nuanced research encounters I experienced throughout the fieldwork. Moreover, even if I was able to identify a presentation of a dominant cultural characteristics similar to that noted in much research on police culture, officers were likely to position themselves against this in complex and contradictory ways (e.g. Souhami 2007b, Martin 1992). My interpretation of the events described in this paper as ‘member tests’ is likely to reflect an unarticulated convention of thinking about fieldwork.

Yet as a new researcher, trying to establish myself with the police and with my colleagues, perceived challenges took on a particular importance. For suspicious officers they provided vital information about whether I could be trusted. And for me, they were means to show these officers – and my colleagues – that I could.

The following pages describe three incidents which I felt represented member tests, and critically explore the way my responses to these connect with fieldwork accounts elsewhere,

and indicate underlying conventions about what constitutes authoritative fieldwork with the police.

### **Taking a joke: conventions of conformity**

Jokes are centrally important to police work. During the research, officers described joking in terms which emphasised the cultural structuring of the police work as dangerous: they were an essential survival mechanism in a stressful and dangerous job, allowing staff to express and reframe shock, frustration or distress (for this function of humour in relation to other occupational contexts see e.g. Collinson 2002, Meerabeau and Page 1998). Yet at the same time joking provides a sense of group identity and belonging, demonstrating a shared language and common understanding (see also, for example, Sims et al 1993). For example, officers described how ‘it’s the banter that holds the force together’ (PC), it ‘gets people working together’ (Chief Inspector). They were therefore an important ‘symbolic resource’ (Collinson 2002), describing and reinforcing the dominant structure of social relations within the service.

As a result, the jokes also reflected the pervasive sexism and discrimination in the police service, both in content and in form. Officers prioritised a particular form of ‘banter’ associated with a masculine, working class identity in which teasing or ‘piss taking’ was central and which placed great importance on the ability to take a joke (for the connection between ‘piss taking’ and identity in other contexts see Collinson 1988, Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). Practical jokes were highly prized: officers put fingerprint ink on the rim of each other’s hats; drew penises on anything left unattended by colleagues (incident report books, hats, stop and search forms); switched the lights off when their colleagues were in the shower; photo-shopped their faces onto pictures of body builders and bikini models. In particular, banter was explicitly described as a way of socialising new recruits into a collective culture. Probationers were frequently the victims of the jokes: as one officer explained, jokes were ‘a giggle, ‘welcome to [police area], people’”.

Jokes therefore not only reinforced but policed the boundaries of group norms. Taking a joke was an important way for new staff to show themselves to be one of the team: at the same time, jokes exerted powerful social pressure to conform (Sims et al 1993, Collinson 1988). As one senior officer said, ‘if you’re an oddball, and if you’re perceived to be an oddball,

then you will find yourself ridiculed'. As such, they reflected a deep anxiety about the shifting and as yet uncertain organisational boundaries set in train by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Officers at all ranks and in all research sites described how, since the Inquiry, "you can't have a joke like you could" (PC). These sentiments were echoed even by those women officers who described the strain of being at the receiving end of a barrage of sexist banter. As one woman PC put it, "it has taken all the fun out the job". Jokes were therefore a site of contested feelings about occupational culture and belonging: a way in which officers could demonstrate their allegiance to the group and to express the contradictions of their experience and the relationship to the dominant culture.

As a new researcher entering the police field, I experienced humour as a powerful way to test my allegiance. Could I take a joke? Yet my attempts to respond to this apparent challenge reveal a particular interpretation of productive field relations, and one which is reflected in writing about fieldwork more widely.

This issue emerged particularly clearly on my first day with a new police team, when a man tried to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge.

There's "a jumper": a man has jumped off the bridge and is stuck in the mud on the river banks... Two fire engines, an ambulance and several police cars are parked along the top of the river bank. We clamber down the steep sides of the banks. It is raining and wet and extremely slippery: we all fall over repeatedly. We reach the water's edge. [The police] have formed a human chain, each of them holding onto the tool belt of the one in front so they don't fall in. ... Meanwhile, a group of about 15 teenage boys have gathered on the bridge high above us, and are spitting on us. ... The mood of the assembled officers is one of suppressed hilarity, I presume because of the mud, wet and spit, and, strangely, a hint of admiration: officers deal with a lot of threats of jumping but very few carry them through. As one PC puts it, "credit to him".

Eventually the man was pulled out of the mud and we traipsed in single file along the river bank back to the police van. The sergeant – the highest ranking officer with us – walked behind me, lighting our path through the dark river bank with a torch.

He says to me "Anna, you've got some mud on your bum". This is unsurprising as I have mud everywhere else. [The PC in front of me] turns round, holds out his hands that are caked in mud up to the elbows and says "I'll rub it off for you". The sergeant says sternly "er, excuse me." This is interesting, I think: he's going to tell him off. But no. He points to the stripes on his shoulders. "Rank. I go first".

This was a surprising moment: it was an overtly sexist joke made by a supervisor in front of his team to a researcher investigating discrimination on behalf of the Home Office. It was, of course, revealing of the gender norms within the team. However, I also experienced this as a provocation, and a test of my marginal position. I was as yet unknown to these officers. Was I going to be someone who would laugh along with the banter and tacitly accept the gender relations that underpinned it, or would I seal my position as an outsider? I laughed. Later, the sergeant noted approvingly that he wasn't sure if I would be 'a bit touchy' about the banter: I had passed the test.

However, looking back at my fieldnotes now it is striking that I have erased from my telling of this story my deep ambivalence about my response. My decision to give tacit approval to officers' banter had complex and ongoing repercussions.

As the shift progressed, officers' jokes became increasingly troubling. Later that evening we were called to a domestic assault in a house of an alcohol addicted couple, to find the woman lying drunk on the floor, incoherent, with her dress pulled up. The sergeant pointed at her and said, in a stage whisper, "that's you on a Friday night, that is". Arguably, the increasing boldness of officers' jokes justified my strategy: by 'passing' into the social relations of the police I had loosened the control that officers may have shown around a researcher and was now witnessing a truer extent of discrimination within the service. However, officers were not reacting to me as an 'insider' but as a 'Home Office' researcher. By sanctioning their behaviour, I provided officers with a new, complicit audience to whom they could perform, made all the more appealing by my powerful, outsider status. Of course, the structuring of the performance I provoked was itself revealing of the culture of the team. But it also implicated me in the harm caused, to the woman in this encounter, and to myself as a recipient of a now legitimised target of an onslaught of sexist jokes.

Moreover, I became implicated in harm to these officers. After all, officers' growing confidence in their performance was misplaced: despite their understanding that, as one PC put it, 'she don't tell tales, do she', as a researcher I do tell tales, including this one. In Van Maanen's terms, my encouragement of participants to drop their guard risked 'symbolic violence', in which participants are 'coaxed, persuaded, pushed, pressured, and sometimes almost blackmailed into providing information to the researcher that they might otherwise prefer to shield' (1979, p45). Further, I had elicited these performances through my own, fraudulent performance. My attempts to act as I imagined the field to be was at best an

artifice and at worst a deception. On my last day with the team, the sergeant told me ‘it has been refreshing. You can’t normally talk to outsiders’. I did not feel proud of this assessment.

Given these difficulties, I now wonder why I felt it so important to conform to these cultural dynamics. It is likely that to some extent I was swept up in the social relations of the police, whereby conformity and solidarity was paramount (e.g. Reiner 2010) and humour a powerful mechanism to ensure it. However, it is also likely I was attempting to conform to the wider field of ethnographic research: I understood that to build rapport and thus reveal the underlying world of police culture, I must disappear into that world as far as possible.

Indeed, this understanding of field relations is often prioritised within police ethnography (and in criminological research more broadly: see e.g. Ferrell and Hamm 1998 for discussions of this strategy). While researchers frequently acknowledge their difference to - and even distaste of - elements of the police organisation, accounts of fieldwork often describe attempts to conceal these differences. For example, Punch vividly describes his fieldwork experience as one of ‘deceit and dissemblance’ as he pretended that he shared in the experiences of officers he was researching (1989, p189); Kraska describes the dilemmas of ‘blurring the distinction between researcher and subject’ (1998, p89) in order to ‘relate’ or ‘understand’ the paramilitary police he was researching. More generally, while the trope of ‘member tests’ describe moments at which researchers are confronted with the disjunction between their personal values and those of the field, there are few contemporary accounts of researchers refusing to take the tests, or of failing them, even where they explicitly wish they could do otherwise (e.g. Marks 2004, Diphooorn 2012).

Ethnographic strategies are of course always context dependent, and it sometimes may be essential for researchers to figuratively disappear from view. I simply note here that even though this understanding of field relations dominates in accounts of fieldwork, it is only one possible interpretation. Building rapport requires understanding, honesty and empathy rather than conformity. Indeed, difference – or ‘foreignness’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p74) - need not undermine trust, but can generate a sense of safety in participants. During this research, for example, officers disclosed deeply personal stories that they said they could not tell their colleagues. Further, the differences researchers bring to a social world can generate valuable insights. For example, in her account of research with the NYPD specialist Emergency Service Unit, Hunt describes how, as an older woman who did not ‘interact with the cops as a man’ (2010, p330) she had insights into the nuances of officers’ experience



which may have otherwise been obscured. In addition, it is quite possible that officers' responses to such differences – including exclusion – would be equally revealing of cultural norms. In other words, difference to participants can be productive. However, again, there are very few accounts of researchers attempting to retain or even maximise difference to their participants rather than minimise it.

It seems therefore that a particular understanding of field relations has come to dominate thinking about fieldwork with the police, in which the building of rapport requires minimising difference with participants. Adopting the imagined norm of the context - even or especially where this conflicts with the researchers' own norms - is the hallmark of 'real' ethnographic fieldwork.

The following pages describe further difficulties with this strategy.

### **Proving yourself: conventions of endurance**

Throughout the research I felt myself to be confronted with challenges about whether I could manage the painful, stressful or upsetting parts of police work. The importance of danger, bravery and physicality in cultural stories of policing has been widely noted (e.g. Silvestri 2017, Loftus 2008), and underpinned the way officers described their work throughout this research. In practice most officers' working lives were structured by not doing very much – waiting for calls, or mundane routine inquiries (also Reiner 2010). However, in all research sites stories abounded of an idealised action orientation where officers 'like to be busy, nicking people, searching people' (PC), prioritise 'driving the nuts off' the pursuit cars (PC), or proactive missions where 'you can go out and hunt' (PC).

As Silvestri (2017) shows, the image of force, strength and stamina which underpin these cultural accounts of 'ideal' police work – and, implicitly, the 'ideal police worker' – are intrinsically associated with male physicality, and sustain the exclusion of women. As a result the body becomes an important site for the performance of cultural police practices (see also Atkinson 2016), and one in which women struggle to succeed. A prominent manifestation of accomplishing this ideal throughout the research was through bodily endurance and discomfort. In particular, officers frequently worked excessive hours, and boasted of enduring the exhaustion that came with it (see Silvestri 2017 on the gendering of time in the police organisation). For example, questioning whether I was 'flagging' on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of a late shift, a sergeant explained 'this is what we do. You'll get second wind'. Similarly,

women officers described how they attempted to overcome their marginalisation within the service by demonstrating they could work harder and longer than the men. As a female DC put it, 'I can work my arse off. I work hours and hours and hours.....The only thing I can do is just put my head down, work hard and prove myself. Which is depressing, but it's reality isn't it? The only way I can earn respect is to work harder than everybody else'.

In this way, 'real' police work was constructed as a feat of embodied masculinity, requiring risk, bravery and stamina. As a woman – and one in a marginal position - I felt under pressure to show I had the stamina and the stomach to handle police business. In other words, I thought I needed to show that I, too, could be one of the boys.

This strategy was encapsulated one freezing and bright winter afternoon, when two men robbed a bank on a major road in central London.

The bank was not well chosen. It was located next to a police station and opposite the offices of a specialist crime unit. At the moment of the robbery, two armed police cars were waiting at traffic lights outside the bank, and a car carrying three officers – and me – was round the corner. Officers leapt out their cars and within minutes the bank was surrounded by police. In panic, the two men climbed on to the roof with the money they had taken. For reasons which remain unclear, they proceeded to throw the money off the roof, causing much excitement and delight among the pedestrians crowding below who leapt about trying to catch it as it blew through the London streets.

However, events then suddenly took on a more serious tone. The men then said they had a gun and a hostage. The police quickly set up cordons around the bank. The car I was travelling in was now contained within this inaccessible zone, our coats within it. We had nothing to do but wait at a cordon, in intense cold and in shirt sleeves, for seven hours until the night shift appeared at 1am.

This was such a miserable experience that it is one of the few times I addressed my colleagues explicitly in my field notes. After recounting the event, I say the following:

“Several things.

1. It is cold.

The 7 hours are extremely difficult. It is utterly, freezing cold. Most officers have warm clothes in their cars but these are now cordoned off and so we can't get at

them. I am wearing a jacket and a cardigan and I have never been so cold in my life. After about an hour I am shaking so hard from the cold that my muscles go into spasm. At about 7[pm] I walk round the block in the hope that my legs will stop hurting so much. My hands are completely numb and my pen has frozen: so even if it was appropriate to write notes I couldn't physically do it. [...]

## 2. There is no food.

But what is worse: we haven't had anything to eat. Most of us haven't had lunch. We obviously can't go on refs [meal break]. [...] By [8pm] I am desperate. I can't provide anything for any of us to eat or drink as all my belongings including my money are in one of the police cars. [...]

## 3. It is boring

During the siege, several officers say that the siege must be giving me a lot of things to write about. In fact it's the complete opposite. It is extremely dull. Seven hours standing around with these officers would usually be a really good source of information. However, it's so cold that no one really feels like talking. When we do talk, I'm so cold that I actually seem to lose a physical capacity for listening: I can't remember anything that anybody says.

## 4. No one has any information

[...] None of the officers know what is happening in the siege, and no information is being passed down by the command team. One of the officers complains that he had to ask the reporters what was happening. I also try to get my information from the media: at 5.30 I go inside a pub to watch the local news. There's a live broadcast from the siege, I think that the press may have better information than us.

## 5. It cemented my relationship with the team

At the time, I felt that staying through the shift was important to establish my relationship with the team and I've no doubt that this happened. There's a camaraderie established by the shared experience of being utterly miserably uncomfortable, and I'm included in that. [...]

This shift undoubtedly made the following day with this team more comfortable. However, the question for us is whether this kind of endurance is worth it. I spend three days with each team before moving on. While I may earn my stripes with one team, does it cross over to others? And in any case, do I need to be accepted? Does it significantly affect the quality of the data? Does it matter for the information we're trying to get? I'm not so sure about this"

These notes tell a story of being swept up in a cultural dynamic within the police whereby I felt I needed to prove myself through physical endurance. I had to 'earn my stripes' by showing that I, too, was brave: I could endure physical discomfort over the excessive hours that were highly prized in the police service, even if it did not generate any useful data. 'Acceptance' had become an end in itself.

However, revisiting these fieldnotes now I am struck by two elements of this story. First, my final paragraph shows that in conducting my fieldwork I had the broader field of

ethnographic research in mind. My concern about putting myself through this discomfort risked disappointing not just the cultural expectations of the police, but of my academic colleagues as well. Feats of endurance were a way of demonstrating my commitment to the field: a means to ‘earn my stripes’ as a police ethnographer.

Second, I show very little interest in the seven hours of waiting in itself. Periods of eventlessness were only ‘a really good source of information’ when I became a useful distraction for bored officers, and would hear stories about their work that I understood to be relevant (e.g. Fassin 2017b). In other words, doing nothing in the cold was merely a means to generate data rather than data itself.

The prioritisation of stories of endurance and risk over the boring, routine or eventless is reflected in other accounts of fieldwork with the police (see e.g. Kraska; Westmarland 2001). For example, in her powerful account of fieldwork in the Durban Public Order Police, Marks (2004) describes shadowing officers on patrols in highly dangerous ground in South Africa. In a gripping, extended extract from her fieldnotes, she describes a twelve hour shift in which she faced the very real risk of being ambushed, shot and threatened with rape (p876-9). Yet as Marks notes, even in ‘exciting contexts’ like the paramilitary police units she was researching, her research also involved attending ‘formalized meetings and workshops’, and above all ‘hanging around’ the offices, ‘endless hours in the offices of police officers, talking about anything from how the unit was functioning, to family crises, to politics, to new personal business ventures’; activities she describes as not as ‘exhilarating or glamorous’ as those she relays in her paper (2004, p880).

Moments of danger and discomfort are disturbing, challenging and illuminating, and I certainly do not suggest that the attention on them is misplaced. However, it is curious that there is not an equivalent attention to the long periods of ‘hanging around’ in tales of police research, including my own. This is particularly striking given that police research has long shown that eventlessness constitutes much of what policing is (e.g. Cain 1973, Holdaway 1983, Phillips 2016), and consequently much of what fieldwork with the police involves. Accounts of doing nothing and the tedium and boredom of fieldwork are therefore as important to understanding fieldwork with the police as they are to understanding policing.

Instead, there seems to be an explicit orientation towards the dangerous, risky and uncomfortable aspects of research in accounts of ethnography. Indeed, some researchers explicitly argue that ethnographers *should* experience danger and discomfort to properly

appreciate the standpoint of participants. Given the constant potential for risk and danger in officers' working lives, for researchers not to experience this directly 'would be to ignore the very substance of the social environment of policing' (Westmarland 2001, p532, see also e.g. Marks 2004, p886). Indeed, Westmarland argues, "to conduct a police ethnography without witnessing violence . . . would be barren and pointless" (2001, p532).

It is of course true that the unique capacity for the legitimate use of state force underpins police work in all its activity, and as a result the potential for danger and uncertainty is constantly in the background of officers' working lives (Bittner 1970, Jauregui 2013). However it is not necessary for researchers to experience directly these relatively rare moments of violence to understand how they structure how officers work and think. Further, the deployment of state force underpins even the 'commonplace and seemingly banal encounters' (Herbert 2017, p27) in police officers dealings with the public. Yet the study of these mundane, implicit manifestations of state sanctioned violence does not receive such normative endorsement.

The effect of the orientation towards the risky and dangerous elements of police work is to shape our sense of what authoritative police fieldwork is. In other words, it appears it has become an unspoken convention that to give a 'true' picture of policing, the researcher needs to show that they have been involved in the most precarious or uncomfortable aspects of occupational life. The tedious, quiet, eventlessness that constitutes most of what both police work and police ethnography actually involves is hidden.

## **The shutters come down: conventions of emotion**

A variation on the cultural importance of bravery in police work concerns police officers' responses to trauma and distress. Death features frequently in cultural stories in the police service: officers commonly told of decomposing bodies, severed limbs and maggots. Stories were often framed as a rite of passage: an induction into 'real' police work, demonstrating officers bravery and stoicism in the face of horrific scenes. For example, on describing one particularly gory death, one PC said "it's the only time I've ever seen undertakers throwing up". In particular, these stories described the importance of socialisation into the cultural expectations of emotion management, in which displays of those emotions deemed 'feminine' – such as compassion, fear, guilt or sadness – are inhibited (Martin 1999,

Pogrebin and Poole 1991). For example, an officer approaching retirement told me about an event twenty years previously when, as a young officer, he was called to a house where a couple had left their 18 and three month old children at home while they went out for the night. During that time, the family's pet ferrets got into the children's cots and killed them, eating their faces and eyeballs. He explained he dealt with this traumatic incident the way 'all police officers' do: 'the shutters come down'.

In this context, my own responses to traumatic events was another site at which the complex, gendered dynamics of field relations were brought into focus. To what extent could I handle distressing events?

This issue arose in acute form one day in central London, when a young woman cyclist was knocked off her bike on a busy road and dragged under the wheels of a large lorry. The officers I was shadowing that day were first on the scene: the woman died shortly after we arrived. My fieldnotes describe my own state of shock:

When we arrive, there are already two officers on the scene, kneeling by a young woman lying on the ground. ... She's clearly in a bad way. Her legs are bent at odd angles. Her face is on one side on the tarmac and looks unusually flattened. Her mouth is open and some of her teeth are missing. The ground is covered with bright scarlet blood – apparently it's this colour when it's aortal.

I have no idea why I'm standing so close to the accident, how I got there, or how long I've been there. But I'm suddenly aware that I'm watching someone die, and that this feels highly intimate and intrusive. So I cross the road and stand on the opposite corner. More fire engines arrive, and set up a tarpaulin across two street lamps. There are now about 10 uniformed people watching the doctors massage the woman's heart.

The complex power relations of my research now became apparent. It was suddenly clear that I was a researcher 'from the Home Office' doing a politically sensitive piece of research about the management of 'major incidents'<sup>5</sup>, watching a major incident unfold.

The inspector comes up to talk to me. He looks flustered and anxious ... It's clear he's nervous and feels his leadership is under scrutiny. He tells me the sergeant had been so firmly in control that perhaps he didn't really need to be there. He adds that confusion about the lines of authority had been an issue in the Lawrence Inquiry: was it clear to me who was in charge? I say that it was. He adds, again, "I'm in charge of the incident".

---

<sup>5</sup> A 'major incident' is the term used by emergency services in the UK to define 'an event or situation requiring the implementation of special arrangements by one or more of the emergency services', which may require multiple services, large numbers of people or media attention. See e.g. LESLP 2015.

Yet at the same time, I felt it was made quite clear to me that I could not manage the job that they are faced with and was thus in no position to criticise:

I'm freezing and I sniff from the cold. Everyone looks at me. The sergeant asks "are you OK?" I am, I'm just cold. "Are you sure? You might have all those qualifications, but nothing prepares you for this". That puts me in my place.

The PC then says "Would you like to get in the back of the van?" There's then an onslaught of people asking if I'm feeling alright: several PCs, a traffic officer and an ambulance driver. "Do you want to get in the van? Go on, get in the van". ... all this attention is somewhat humiliating. It's very public, and in the light of the sergeant's intervention, it looks like I can't handle police business. For instance, the ambulance driver holds my arms and looks into my eyes: "are you OK? We do this all the time, but every now and then you see someone that doesn't look right and you think, uh oh".

Given the cultural pressures described above, I felt the only possible response was to show that I could cope.

Now that I am distanced from the dynamics of this fieldwork, I can see two further ways to tell this first story. The second is a story about positionality and interpretation. While reactions of police staff may have been intended to minimise a threat that I represented, I now see they may also have been both insightful and kind. Despite my qualifications I was not 'prepared for this'. I undoubtedly didn't 'look right'. I desperately wanted to get into the van. Yet the dynamics of social relations produced by my specific position within this field led to my interpretation of these encounters isolating and diminishing, and thus a test that I must pass. My emotional responses therefore enable an understanding of field relations, and illuminate a core conceptual research question: it illuminates how institutional discrimination has an important subjective facet in which previous experiences of overt discrimination – such as the months of sexist jokes and sexualisation to which I had been subject – form a lens through which all behaviour is understood (see REF 3).

However, there is a third way of telling this story, which I have omitted entirely from my field notes. This is a story of intense, raw emotion: of shock, anxiety and distress. I watched a woman die, in a context in which I felt excluded, marginalised and under scrutiny, while desperately trying to placate the anxieties of those around me. I was consumed by waves of panic and nausea. On reading this years later I am astonished to realise that I have omitted the most vivid details of my experience, which I live with still. The woman was a student at my university, she was exactly my age, and she looked like me. This self-identification intensely compounded the distress and shock of watching her die. I was desperate to find a way of

distancing myself from her death. My enduring memory of the incident is watching the doctors cut off her clothing and seeing that her chest appeared to be flat: I was overwhelmed by a profound, temporary and mistaken sense of relief that she was not a woman. At some point officers asked me if I could find out whether the University held details of her next of kin. In shock, I agreed. I remember the panic of not knowing who to call, realising I could no longer remember my colleagues' phone numbers, and jabbing desperately at the keypad with numb fingers.

There are a number of reasons why I may not have wished to disclose the rawness of these experiences. First, these are intensely personal responses which I may have wanted to keep private. Second, containing my emotion may be an important coping strategy in line with that employed by many police officers, allowing people confronted with distressing incidents to manage and reframe their reactions (e.g. Pogrebin and Poole 1991). However, it is also possible that the control I convey in my fieldnotes was an attempt to emulate what I believed to be appropriate to my role as a new ethnographer.

Emotion has a complex position in accounts of ethnographic research. Fieldwork is an essentially emotional form of work. As Van Maanen (1988, p2) puts it,

“Fieldworkers .. learn to move among strangers while holding themselves in readiness for episodes of embarrassment, affection, misfortune, ... deceit, confusion, isolation, warmth, adventure, fear, concealment, pleasure, surprise, insult and always possible deportation”.

However, as Kleinman and Copp (1993) argue, just like any other occupational group, fieldworkers learn how to they are supposed to feel in and about their work. As such, we have traditionally received mixed messages: both that emotion contaminates the objectivity required for rigorous research and that it is required for the formation of meaningful field relations. In other words, to produce plausible accounts, ethnographers learn to be selectively emotional.

More recently, a growing recognition of the autoethnographic dimensions of fieldwork has led to increasing calls for the repositioning of emotional experience into the centre of accounts of ethnography. This important body of work is drawing attention in particular to the importance of emotions as a mode of participation and inquiry. Emotional responses become a powerful form of knowledge both about the field, and about the interpretative



nature of ethnographic inquiry (e.g. Diphooorn 2012, Kraska 1998, Jewkes 2012, Lumsden 2009, Pickering 2001). The second telling of my story illustrates this form of writing.

Yet for the moment, it is notable that the intense, raw, emotional reactions to fieldwork – the equivalents to my third telling of this story - remain relatively rare<sup>6</sup>. While we give glimpses into the pain, boredom, fear, and delight of fieldwork, accounts of emotion remain primarily purposive. Unmediated, undirected accounts of feeling are largely excised from ethnographic writing. The ethnographic experience of emotion is instead a curated performance.

As a result, confessional tales of emotion are curiously muted. We don't feel emotion: we 'know' about 'emotionality'. It is possible then that the management of our emotions remains a way in which we can demonstrate the authenticity of our research. To show our authority, we express just enough emotion. Enough to show the empathy and reflexivity which indicate our awareness of epistemological complexities of ethnographic research, enough to show the ways in which their biography and experience can enrich our knowledge of the field, but no more.

## Conclusions

Re-studying fieldnotes after many years provides new insights into the dynamics of fieldwork. Nearly fifteen years after their generation, a second layer of story appears within my fieldnotes: they not only describe my attempts to navigate the norms that structure the social world of the police, but my professional world as an academic ethnographer as well. The omissions and the selection and presentation of encounters in my fieldnotes acknowledge and reproduce common themes in writing about the work of police ethnography, which appear to reveal a series of unarticulated conventions about what has come to constitute authoritative fieldwork. A particular version of fieldwork emerges: one which prizes a form of field relations in which researchers overcome challenges to conform into the dominant norms of the setting; which prioritises tales of physicality, endurance, risk and action, thereby

---

<sup>6</sup> There are of course exceptions: for example, Marks' (2004) account of her fieldwork described above is so powerful in part because of the vividness in the way she conveys her fear: she describes being 'petrified', her heart racing and her stomach dropping and states 'I thought I would die of fright' (p879); similarly Diphooorn (2012, p212) describes being so terrified 'my heart started beating excessively, my mouth became dry, and I nervously scratched my face and head'.

reproducing a narrative of research as dangerous, difficult and exciting; and which erases undirected, uncurated emotion.

It seems therefore that the preoccupations of police researchers have come to mirror the preoccupations of police officers themselves. However unconsciously and unwittingly, the construction of fieldwork prioritised in tales of police ethnography reflect the social relations of police work, in particular in its gendering. In this regard, tales of police ethnography reflect the long-standing reproduction of gendered field relations in criminological fieldwork more broadly. As Hobbs (1993) put it in his excoriating assessment of 'street' ethnographers, 'Machismo, as well as a veil of eccentricity, is responsible for the cult of field-work, as some of the grime of 'real' life is brought back to the office' (1993, p62). It is however ironic that these dynamics which are so powerfully criticised through police ethnography appear to be reflected in the work through which research is produced.

By uncovering the unarticulated conventions of fieldwork, this paper has two important implications for thinking about police ethnography. First, it suggests that we may focus on certain aspects of the experience of the police world and not others. Just as the construction of 'real' police work leads officers to prioritise work which is culturally prized over that which is not, it is possible to see how ethnographers gravitate towards what they understand to be recognised as 'real' police fieldwork. So, for example, an orientation towards action limits interest in the tedious, endless hanging around that is the primary substance of both fieldwork and police work. Yet these boring, mundane, routine activities are both what most police work is, and the site at which contested understandings of occupational culture, identity and belonging are manifested and negotiated. In other words, it is here, in this low-level, mundane, unremarkable aspect of experience that is the substance of ethnography of policing as well as of fieldwork.

Second, by revealing the ways that ethnographers curate even their most private writings, this paper indicates that there is much of the fieldwork experience that remains hidden. This suggests the importance of different kinds of ethnographic accounts: those in which researchers explore different forms of field relations that explores difference with research participants rather than attempts to minimising it; in which they fail member tests or refuse to take them, or reject the construction of tests altogether. It also suggests the importance of explicit accounts of emotion: not just as a way of knowing about the field, but as an integral part of the experience and effects of fieldwork.

Above all, this paper suggests the importance of recognising the centrality of the academic field in structuring the way that ethnographers think and work. In other words, we need to be reflexive not just about our own identities and subjectivities as researchers, but about their interplay with the unwritten, informal rules and assumptions which structure the way we invest accounts of research with authority, and thus how we understand what it is to do ‘real’ fieldwork with the police.

## References

- Ackroyd, S and Thompson, P (1999): *Organizational Misbehaviour*. London: Sage.
- Atkinson, C. (2016). 'Patriarchy, Gender, Infantilisation: A Cultural Account of Police Intelligence Work in Scotland.' *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 50 (2) 1–18.
- Atkinson, P (1990): *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual constructs of reality*. London: Routledge.
- Banton, M (1964): *The Policeman in the Community*. London : Tavistock.
- Bittner, E (1970): *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Mental Health.
- Cain, ME (1973): *Society and the Policeman's Role*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Charles, G (2012): 'Community re-studies: lessons and prospects'. *The Sociological Review* 60 (3). 405-420.
- Clifford, J (1983): 'On ethnographic authority'. *Representations* 1 (2): 118-146
- Coffey, A (1999): *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London: Sage
- Collinson, DL (1988): ' 'Engineering Humour': Masculinity, joking and conflict in shop-floor relations'. *Organization Studies* 9 (2): 181-199
- Collinson, DL (2002): 'Managing Humour'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39:3 269-288
- Diphoorn, T (2012): 'The Emotionality of Participation: Various Modes of Participation in Ethnographic Fieldwork on Private Policing in Durban, South Africa'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 42(2) 201 –225
- Douglas, M (1986): *How Institutions Think*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Emerson, RM (Ed) (1983): *Contemporary Field Research: A collection of readings*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Emerson, RM, Fretz, RI and Shaw, LL (2011): *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Second Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fassin, D (Ed) (2017a): *Writing the World of Policing: the difference ethnography makes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fassin, D (2017b): Boredom. *In* D Fassin (ed) *Writing the World of Policing: the difference ethnography makes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Pp269-292

- Ferrell, J and Hamm, MS (1998): True confessions: crime, deviance and field research. In J Ferrell and MS Hamm (Eds): *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance and Field Research*. Boston, Mass: Northeastern University Press: 2-19
- Foster, JA, Newburn, T and Souhami, A (2005): *Assessing the Impact of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*. London: Home Office. HORS 294
- Gupta, A and Fergusson, J (1997): Discipline and practice: the 'field' as site, method and location in anthropology. In *Anthropological locations: boundaries and grounds of a field science*. Ed Akhil Gupta and James Fergusson, 1-46. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hammersley, M and Atkinson, P (2007): *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge
- Henry, A (2017): Reflexive academic-practitioner collaboration with the police. In S Armstrong, J Blaustein and A Henry (eds): *Reflexivity and Criminal Justice: Intersections of policy, practice and research*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 169-190
- Herbert, S (2017): Accountability: ethnographic engagement and the ethics of the police (United States). In D Fassin (ed) *Writing the World of Policing: the difference ethnography makes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Pp 23-41
- Hobbs, D (1993): Peers, careers and academic fears: writing as field-work. In D Hobbs and T May (eds) *Interpreting the Field: Accounts of Ethnography*. Oxford, OUP. pp 45-66
- Holdaway, S. (1983). *Inside the British Police*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hunt, JC (2010): *Seven Shots: An NYPD Raid on a Terrorist Cell and Its Aftermath*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jauregui, B (2013): Dirty anthropology: epistemologies of violence and ethical entanglements in police ethnography. In W Garriott (Ed): *Policing and Contemporary Governance: the anthropology of police in practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan pp125-153
- Jewkes, Y (2012): 'Autoethnography and emotion as intellectual resources: doing prison research differently'. *Qualitative Inquiry* 18 (1) 63-75
- Kleinman, S and Kopp, MA (1993): *Emotions and Fieldwork*. London: Sage.
- Kreska, P (1998): Enjoying Militarism: political/personal dilemmas in studying US police paramilitary units. In J Ferrell and MS Hamm (Eds) *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance and Field Research*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. 88-110.
- LESLP (2015): *Major Incident Procedure Manual*. Version 9.4. Available at <https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/major-incident-procedure-manual-9th-ed.pdf> Last Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

- Loftus, B (2008): 'Dominant culture interrupted: recognition, resentment and the politics of change in an English police force'. *British Journal of Criminology* 48, 756–777
- Loftus, B (2009): *Police Culture in a Changing Word*. Oxford: OUP.
- Lumsden, K (2009): '“Don’t ask a woman to do another woman’s job”: gendered interactions and the emotional ethnographer'. *Sociology*, 43 (3), 497-513
- Lumsden, K and Winter, A (Eds) (2014): *Reflexivity in Criminological Research: Experiences with the powerful and powerless*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Macpherson, Sir William (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny* CM 4262-1 London: HMSO
- Martin, J (1992): *Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Martin, SE (1999): 'Police force or police service? Gender and emotional labor'. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 561 (January), pp111-126
- Marks, M (2004): 'Researching police transformation: the ethnographic imperative'. *British Journal of Criminology* 44 (6), pp 866-888.
- Meerabeau, L and Page, S (1998): 'Getting the job done': emotion management and cardiopulmonary resuscitation in nursing. *In* Bendelow, G and Williams, SJ (eds.): *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*. London: Routledge. Pp295-312
- O'Reilly, K (2012): 'Ethnographic returning, qualitative longitudinal research and the reflexive analysis of social practice'. *Sociological Review* 60 (3), 518-536
- Pearson, G (1993): *Talking a good fight: authenticity and distance in the ethnographer’s craft*. *In* D Hobbs and T May (eds) *Interpreting the Field: Accounts of Ethnography*. Oxford, OUP. pp vii-xx
- Phillips, SW (2016): 'Police discretion and boredom: what officers do when there is nothing to do'. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 45 (5) 580-601
- Pickering, S (2001): 'Undermining the sanitized account: violence and emotionality in the field in Northern Ireland'. *British Journal of Criminology* 41 (3), 485-501
- Porgrebin, M and Poole, ED (1991): 'Police and tragic events: the management of emotions'. *Journal of Criminal Justice* 19 (1) 395-403
- Punch, M (1989): 'Researching police deviance: a personal encounter with the limitations and liabilities of field-work'. *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 40, No. 2. pp. 177-204

- Rabe-Hemp, C (2009): 'POLICEwomen or Police WOMEN? Doing gender and police work'. *Feminist Criminology* 4 (2) 114-129
- Reiner, R (2010): *The Politics of the Police*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Oxford: OUP.
- Rhodes, R (2005): 'Everyday life in a ministry: public administration as anthropology'. *American Review of Public Administration* 35 (1), 3- 25
- Rock, P (2001): Symbolic interactionism and ethnography. In P Atkinson, A Coffey, S Delamont, J Lofland and L Lofland (Eds): *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage. 26-38
- Rowe, M (2007): 'Tripping Over Molehills: Ethics and the Ethnography of Police Work' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 10:1, 37-48
- Scheper-Hughes, N (2000): 'Ire in Ireland'. *Ethnography* 1(1), 117–140
- Silvestri, M. (2017) 'Police culture and gender: Revisiting the 'cult of masculinity''. *Policing*, 11 (3) pp 289-300
- Sims, D, Fineman, S and Gabriel, Y (1993): *Organizing and Organizations: An Introduction*. London: Sage
- Smith, DJ and Gray, J (1985) *Police and People in London: the PSI Report (No. 621)*, London: Policy Studies Institute
- Souhami, A (2007a): 'Understanding Institutional Racism The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the Police Service Reaction' in Michael Rowe (ed.) *Policing Beyond Macpherson*. Cullompton: Willan. 66-87
- Souhami, A (2007b): *Transforming Youth Justice: Occupational identity and cultural change*. Collumpton, Willan
- Souhami, A (2014): 'Institutional Racism and Police Reform: An Empirical Critique'. *Policing and Society*, 24 (1), pp 1-21
- Van Maanen, J (1979): 'The fact of fiction in organisational ethnography' *Administrative Science Quartely*, 24 (4) pp539-550
- Van Maanen, J (1988): *Tales of the Field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Maanen, J (2006): 'Ethnography then and now'. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*. 1 (1) 13-21.
- Van Maanen, J (2010): 'A song for my supper: more tales of the field'. *Organizational Research Methods*, 13 (2) 240-255

- Westmarland, L (2000): Taking the Flak: Operational policing, fear and violence. *In* G Lee-Treweek and S Linkogle. *Danger in the Field: Risk and Ethics in Social Research*, London, Routledge.26-42
- Westmarland, L. (2001) 'Blowing the whistle on police violence: ethics, research and ethnography', *British Journal of Criminology*, vol.41 (2), pp.523-35.
- Winlow, S, Hobbs, D, Lister, S and Hadfield, P (2001): 'Get ready to duck: bouncers and the realities of ethnographic research on violent groups'. *British Journal of Criminology* 41 (3) pp536-548.